

Rake It, Don't Roast It:

Your Guide to Leaf Disposal

The beautiful vivid colors of Fall are one of Western Pennsylvania's most prized assets. As beautiful as they are, leaves can become a nuisance. During Fall months, particularly in October and November, residents struggle with the best way to dispose of leaves on their property. It may seem tempting to sweep the leaves onto the street or even burn them, but this may create a long term problem for our ecosystem.

Consequences of Burning Leaves

- Leaf burning is damaging to air quality and studies show a link between high level of particulate pollution released from smoke, causing chronic coughs and respiratory illnesses. This can be very troubling for those who suffer from asthma and other respiratory problems.
- Burning leaves can create a fire hazard as they can easily get out of control. As such, many municipalities have restrictions on when and what is permitted to burn.

Effects of Sweeping Leaves onto the Street

- Unless your municipality has a curbside leaf collection program, there can be impacts to the environment when leaves are left to wash away into the storm drains as they can clog pipes, increasing the risk of flooding during heavy rains.
- Once in the storm sewers, the leaf debris that carry fertilizers and pesticides, along with other yard waste, will outfall into lakes and streams without any water quality treatment.
- This pollution promotes the growth of algae blooms that degrade water quality, resulting in the harming of lake and river ecosystems as well as aquatic life.

Offsite Disposal

- Many municipalities hold scheduled leaf pick up days. Check your local municipality's website or contact the office by telephone to see if this program is offered within your community.
- Local organizations may have drop-off centers to dispose of bagged leaves for free or a small fee. Do not dispose of leaves with regular trash as this takes up valuable space in landfills!



Mulching and Composting

- Leaves are inexpensive and beneficial mulch that can be used around trees, shrubs, and in gardens.
- When leaves decompose, nutrients are added to the soil acting as a natural mulching additive. Leaves also act as a protectant in cold temperature fluctuations.
- Using a lawn mower to mulch the leaves into fine pieces will help decompose on your lawn.
- A good compost mix will consist of a 3 to 1 ratio of leaves to grasses.
- To prevent unpleasant odors that can occur when materials decompose without oxygen, compost should be turned regularly to ensure that air is reaching the center of the pile.



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